

REPORT OF THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION

On April 15, 2026, the Presbytery of the West overtured the 46th General Assembly to amend Section 9-3A of the *Book of Government* (the “**POW 9-3A Overture**”). The Permanent Judicial Commission of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (the “**PJC**”) examined the proposed amendment pursuant to Section G.21-3D.2.a.

The POW 9-3A Overture is substantially similar to the PNW 9-3A Overture, which the PJC previously reviewed. The PNW 9-3A Overture, which has become commonly known as the “redline” overture, and the instant POW 9-3A Overture differ in that the POW 9-3A eliminates the word “unnatural” as a modifier to “desires or affections,” adds certain references to an explanatory footnote, and adds a second explanatory footnote acknowledging the possibility of a believer’s success in putting to death same-sex attraction in this life.

The question presented is whether those revisions are sufficient to alter the conclusions we reached with respect to the PNW 9-3A Overture’s clarity, consistency, and compatibility. They are not. Concerning the “three-Cs,” the POW 9-3A Overture has the same strengths and deficiencies as the PNW 9-3A Overture.

Accordingly, after due consideration, the PJC determined as follows regarding the POW 9-3A Overture:

Question Presented	PJC Determination
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of clarity of language?	Yes. Vote: 8-1.
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of consistency of language?	No. Vote: 5-4.
Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of compatibility with other provisions of the EPC Constitution?	No. Vote: 5-4.

The PJC’s task was limited. We did not determine the wisdom, necessity, or pastoral desirability of the POW 9-3A Overture, but rather evaluated whether the proposed language is prepared for integration into the Constitution. Our evaluation of the “three-C” criteria helps the General Assembly determine whether an amendment, such as the POW 9-3A Overture, is constitutionally serviceable in its present form, apart from the merits of the proposal itself.

This constitutes our report and recommendation to the General Assembly.¹

¹ See G.21-3D.2.b.

I. Relationship to Prior Analysis

The POW 9-3A Overture adopts an operative structure nearly identical to the PNW 9-3A Overture. It states:

Those who profess, persist in, or identify with desires or affections ... are disqualified from holding office in Christ's Church.

The only change to the operative provision is the removal of the adjective "unnatural," which appears after the word "with" and before the word "desires" in the PNW 9-3A Overture.

The other revisions offered by the Presbytery of the West are primarily explanatory in nature. In particular, the overture adds a footnote stating that:

[R]epentant believers experiencing such desires are true believers and included in Christ's church. Likewise, by the redemption of Jesus Christ, such desires and the resulting disqualification may be removed in this life.

The PJC recognizes this addition as an effort to acknowledge the reality of progressive sanctification in the desires and affections of believers. The possibility of victory in Christ over a particular sin on this side of glory is not to be denied.

II. Clarity

The POW revisions do not materially alter the clarity analysis we undertook with the PNW 9-3A Overture, however. The operative terms of the provision remain materially unchanged, and the same considerations regarding the interpretation of "profess," "persist," and "identify" apply. Although these terms admit of some variability in interpretation, the PJC majority does not view this as fatal.

The language of the POW 9-3A Overture, taken as a whole, conveys a sufficiently definite meaning in context to permit examination of candidates by presbyteries and sessions. It directs attention to matters that may be explored through a candidate's words and reputation within the church's existing processes. Our church courts have a history of wisely applying constitutional text that admits of some variability, and there is every reason to continue to trust reasonably informed presbyters in faithfully doing so in the future.²

The POW 9-3A Overture therefore satisfies the requirement of "clarity of language."

III. Consistency

The PJC previously concluded that the PNW 9-3A Overture is inconsistent with the logic of the Westminster Standards, particularly in its treatment of indwelling sin and progressive sanctification.

² If a lower court errs by approving an inappropriate candidate for office, Chapter 14 of the *Book of Discipline* allows a concerned elder with standing the opportunity to file a complaint with a higher court and resolve the matter.

The Presbytery of the West revisions implicitly acknowledge those doctrines but do not integrate them into the operation of the proposed rule. The disqualification attaches to the mere presence of a category of desires (i.e., same-sex attraction), rather than to the candidate’s response to sinful impulses in repentance and life.

In addition to being inconsistent with the logic of the Standards, the POW 9-3A Overture, like the PNW 9-3A Overture, introduces internally inconsistent terminology in its last sentence. If adopted by the General Assembly, G.9-3A would contain language erroneously suggesting that presbyteries “elect” Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons, and that congregations “elect” Teaching Elders.

For these reasons, the POW 9-3A Overture fails to satisfy the requirement of “consistency of language.”

IV. Compatibility

Our prior analysis of the PNW 9-3A Overture’s compatibility with the Constitution, including the Westminster Standards, applies to the POW 9-3A Overture, as well. In short, the Westminster Standards teach *both* that sinful desires must be put to death³ *and* that the remnants of sin remain in every believer.⁴ The Standards do not single out particular categories of indwelling sin and remove them from that framework. Because the Standards are subscribed by every elder and form part of the Constitution’s doctrinal framework, proposed amendments to the Constitution must preserve both truths.⁵

The issue is whether the Constitution may treat the presence of certain desires or affections, without regard to the believer’s repentance and progress in holiness, as *per se* determinative of fitness for office. The majority concluded that it may not do so without departing from the system of doctrine set forth in the Standards. The Presbytery of the West revisions acknowledge these principles but do not reconcile them within the operative structure of the provision. The overture continues to treat the presence of a condition as determinative of qualification for office, without incorporating the broader framework of sanctification described in the Standards.

For these reasons, the majority concluded that the overture does not satisfy the requirement of “compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution.”

V. Conclusion

The PJC recognizes and appreciates the effort of the Presbytery of the West to uphold the biblical sexual ethic and maintain the purity of Christ’s church. The revisions made to the original redline overture reflect a desire to affirm both the seriousness of sin and the reality of progressive

³ See Westminster Larger Catechism 138 & 139.

⁴ See Westminster Confession of Faith 6.5 & 13.1-3; Westminster Larger Catechism 78 & 79.

⁵ See G.23-1B [stating that “[n]o changes may be made to the Book of Order, including any of its parts composed of the Book of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Book of Worship, that would be contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms” (emphasis in original removed)].

sanctification. Nevertheless, because those revisions do not alter the operative structure of the text, the conclusions previously reached by the PJC remain applicable.

The POW 9-3A Overture satisfies the requirement of clarity of language, but fails to satisfy the requirements of consistency of language and compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution.⁶

Accordingly, for the reasons stated above and in our prior analysis of the PNW 9-3A Overture, the Permanent Judicial Commission respectfully and prayerfully recommends that the General Assembly consider these conclusions in determining whether to accept or decline the POW 9-3A Overture.

⁶ The PJC minority herein adopts and incorporates by reference the alternative analysis offered in the Minority Report for the PNW 9-3A Overture.